

A Prairie in Christy: An Educational Picture Book

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

I have loved art and nature since I was a child. I wanted to combine those interests with this project to produce an educational picture book about the small area of tallgrass prairie in Christy Woods on the campus of Ball State University. Tallgrass prairie is a habitat that has faced drastic decline due to habitat destruction. With this project I hope to provide a way to get children interested in unique but threatened habitats like these and inspire them to learn more.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Kamal Islam for being my advisor for this project and for sticking with me despite the difficult circumstances this year has had.

I would also like to thank my sister, Cassandra, and my parents, April, and Jay, for supporting me during this time and providing motivation.

Process Analysis Statement

Throughout my life there have always been two things I have been fond of: nature and creating art. During my time as an undergraduate I have had the opportunity to take many classes that involved learning about the natural world, but have not had much time to pursue my artistic interests. For this project I wanted to find a way to combine the two, and as a result I decided I would write and illustrate a short picture book. Over the past few years I had been into Christy Woods on campus as part of various classes, and while the woods themselves are more of the main attraction, I found myself intrigued by the grassy area near the Rinard Orchid Greenhouse. It was a type of habitat I had no other experience with before coming to campus and because of the interest I initially took in it I decided that this would be the focus of my project.

Before I started working, I knew I needed a plan. First would come research, where I would gather and organize the information and sources I was working with. Next would be plotting out the general flow of the book, which would include translating the information I had gathered through research into a form that was clear and simple to understand. Next would be setting up what information should be on each page, and lastly drawing out each page and making sure any formatting was correct.

When I first started my research, I thought it would be easy enough to find the information I was looking for. The Ball State University website itself has a page dedicated to Christy Woods and contained enough basic information about the woods and its history. For more information about prairies I turned to the database resources I had available to me, however, I quickly found that I was having a difficult time finding information I thought I could actually use. In the end I was able to find more of what I was looking for on reputable websites

from educational institutions, field guides, or from digging deeper into the Ball State University website, where I was able to find a document containing a management plan for the property.

After I had gathered my information, I set about organizing it into an order I thought would make logical sense. This is where I first opened the main software I would be using to set up the book and create the illustrations. I created the entire book using the Procreate app for iPad Pro and Apple Pencil. It is a software that I was very familiar with and outside of just drawing capability had a variety of features that would assist my process, such as layer grouping and text tools. I initially set up a page template that I could duplicate as needed, containing an area for text at the bottom and a blank space for illustrations above it. Once the template was complete I made copies of it and began to transfer notes from my research onto each page as a way of figuring out how much information each page should have and ultimately how many pages I would need. Once I had determined what page would contain what information I set about finalizing the text for each page, trying my best to ensure that the final product would be easy for anyone to understand, while still being interesting and informative.

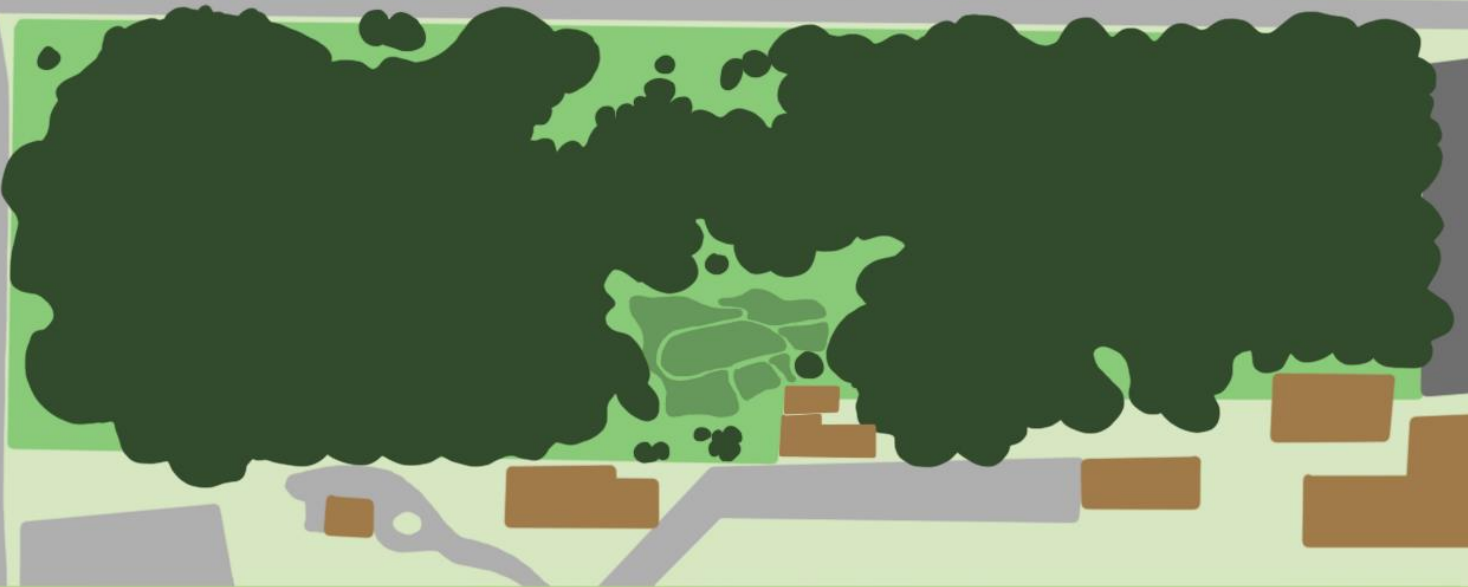
The last step was the illustrations. I wanted to tackle each page individually based on the information that it would provide, but I also realized that I would need to choose a consistent style that I could replicate on each page, but could not be overly detailed or I would not have time to finish. At the same time, I did not want the illustrations to distract too much from the text and vice versa. After a few test pages I found a style I thought I could work with. Even with the relatively simple style that I chose it still took me much longer than I thought it would to finish illustrating each page.

In the end I learned a great deal about just how long and involved the process of writing and illustrating even a short book is. Every step took longer than I thought it would. I had areas of frustration and struggle, but in the end I managed to push through. I am proud of myself for completing it and I hope it comes across as intended: an educational experience combining my interests that might prompt someone else to become interested too.

A Prairie in Christy

Written and Illustrated by:
Alexandra Striegle

This is what it looks like from above!



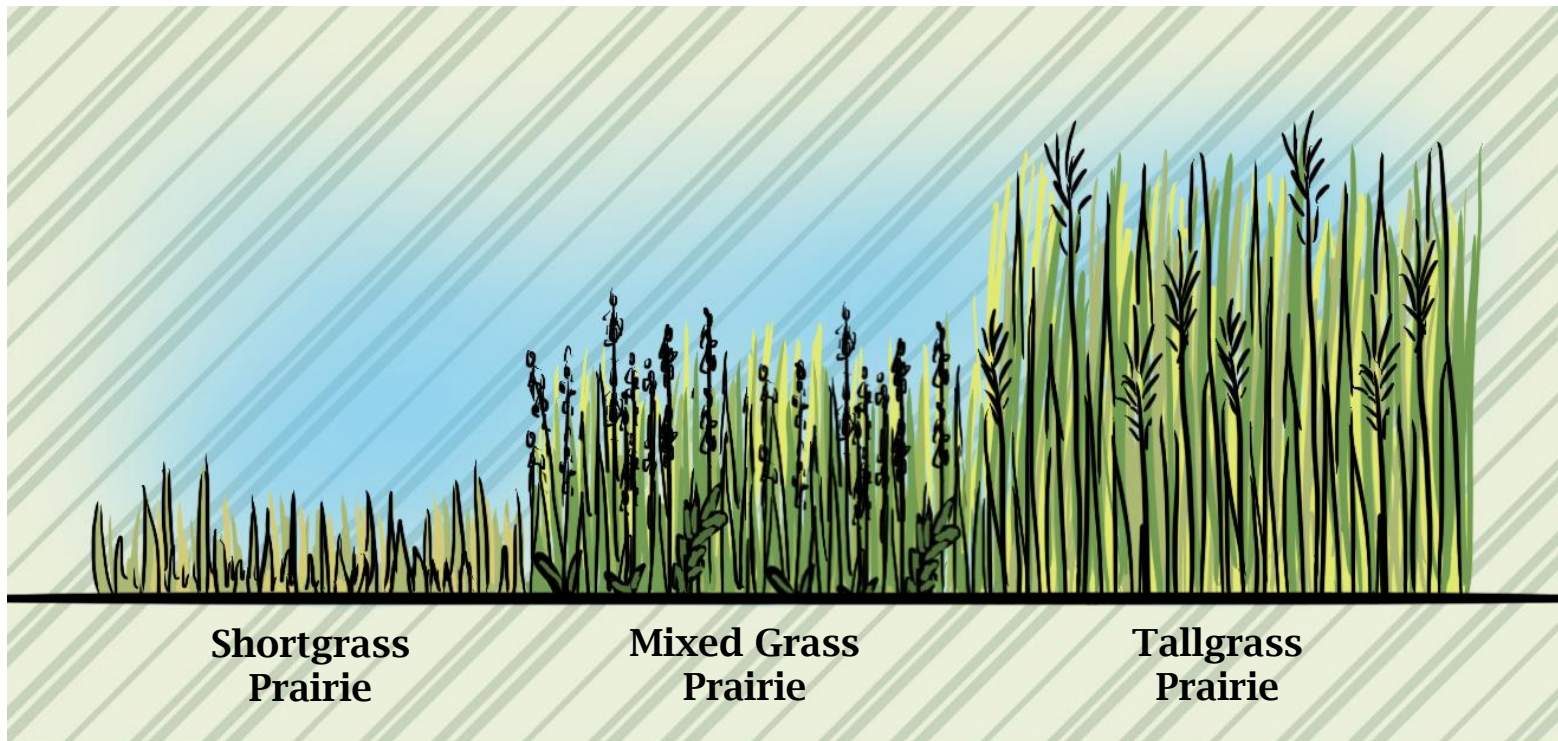
Welcome to Christy Woods! Christy Woods is on the campus of Ball State University. It covers just about 17 acres – which is the size of almost 13 football fields!



**Most of Christy Woods is what you would think to find
in woods: trees! But in the center is an open area that
is filled with grass instead.**



The grasses and other plants here are not like the grass you might see in your yard at home. These grow very tall! Together they form a unique habitat called a tallgrass prairie.



**Prairies can actually be split into three different types.
They are shorter and drier in the west but are taller
and wetter in the east.**

Common Grasses in Tallgrass Prairies



Big Bluestem



Switchgrass

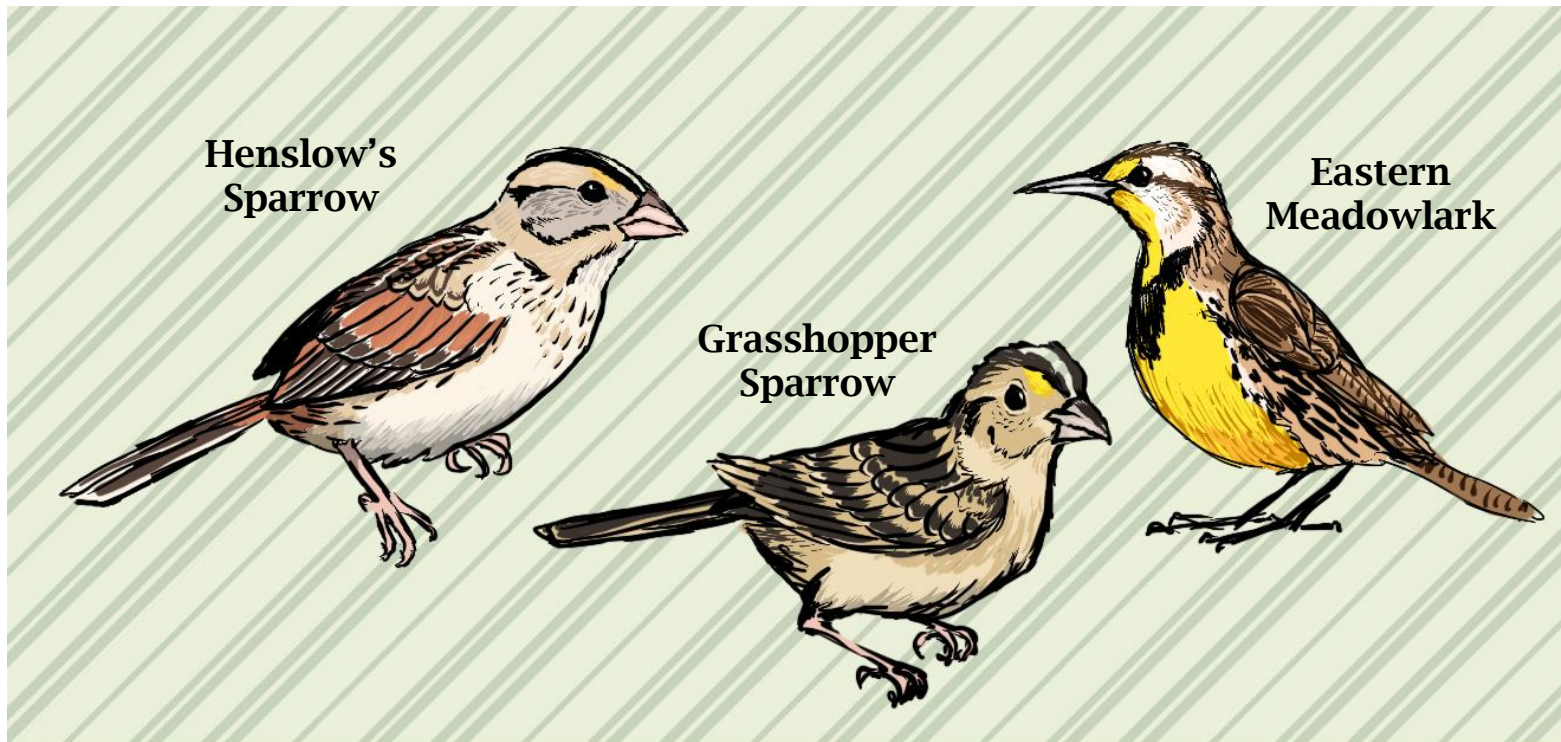


Indiangrass

**The grass area of Christy Woods is a tallgrass prairie.
These prairies grow the tallest grasses and receive
more rain than the other types.**



Prairies used to cover almost one-fifth of the North American landscape. Prairie land is usually flat and full of nutrients. Because of this, much of it has been turned into farms for grains.



Many songbirds rely on prairie habitats for food, shelter, and nesting. With less of their normal habitat around, the numbers of some bird species have been decreasing as well.

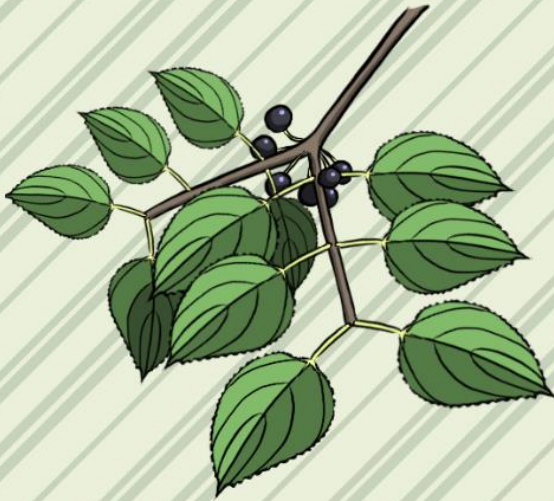


In north-east Indiana, forests were spotted with patches of tallgrass prairie, just like in Christy Woods! However, these were on a much larger scale.



Christy Woods is also different because it is a small patch of mostly natural environment that is surrounded by an urban environment such as buildings and roads.

Invasive Plant Species in Indiana



Common Buckthorn



Black Jetbead

This makes Christy Woods isolated. Isolated habitats have populations that are at a higher risk. It is easier for isolated native populations to either go extinct or be overtaken by invasive species.

Invasive Plant Species in Indiana



Garlic Mustard



Bush Honeysuckle

Those that look after Christy Woods make sure to keep an eye out for invasive plants and keep them from growing in too many places.



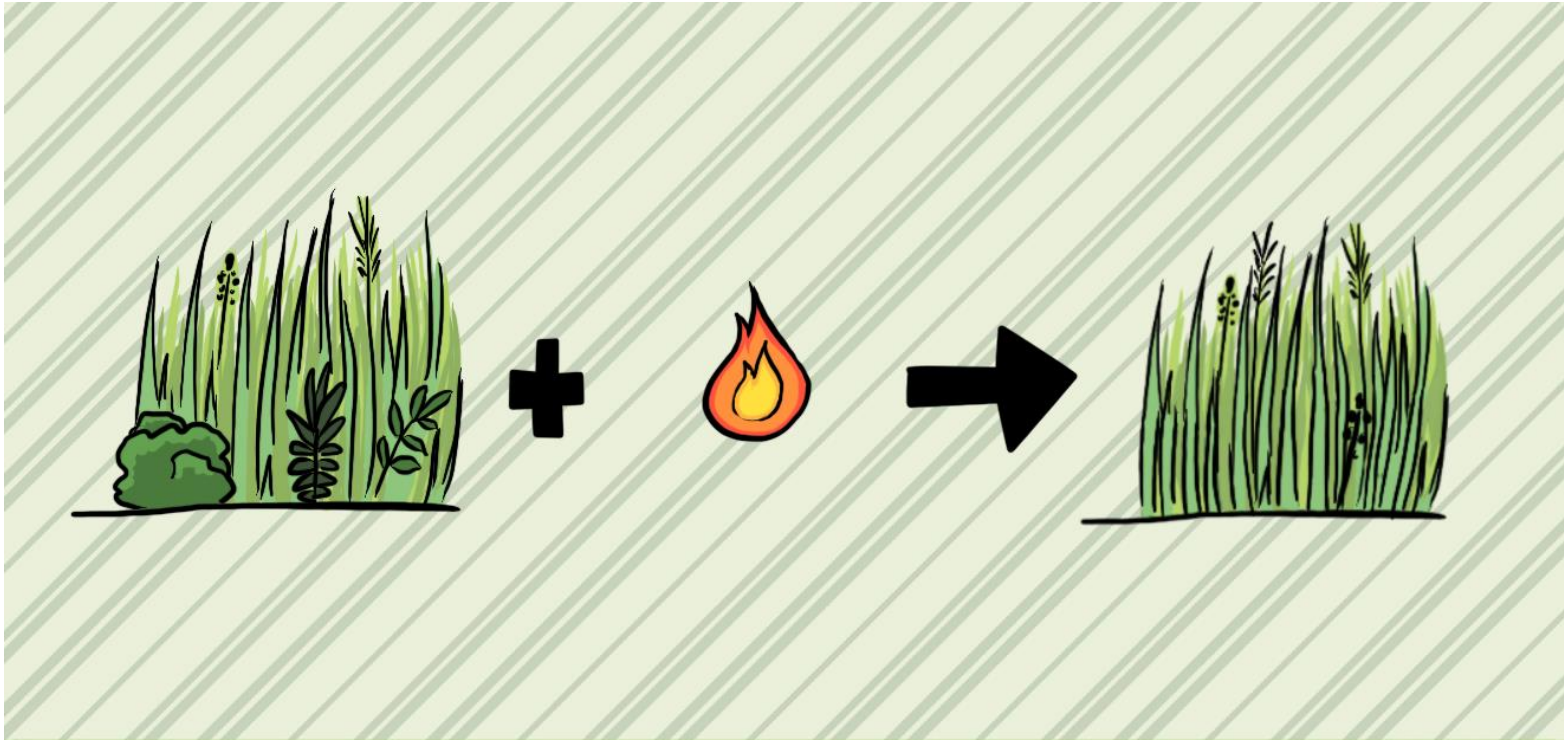
The small tallgrass prairie in Christy Woods is carefully managed to grow native plants. Larger prairies are naturally maintained by a combination of grazing and fire.



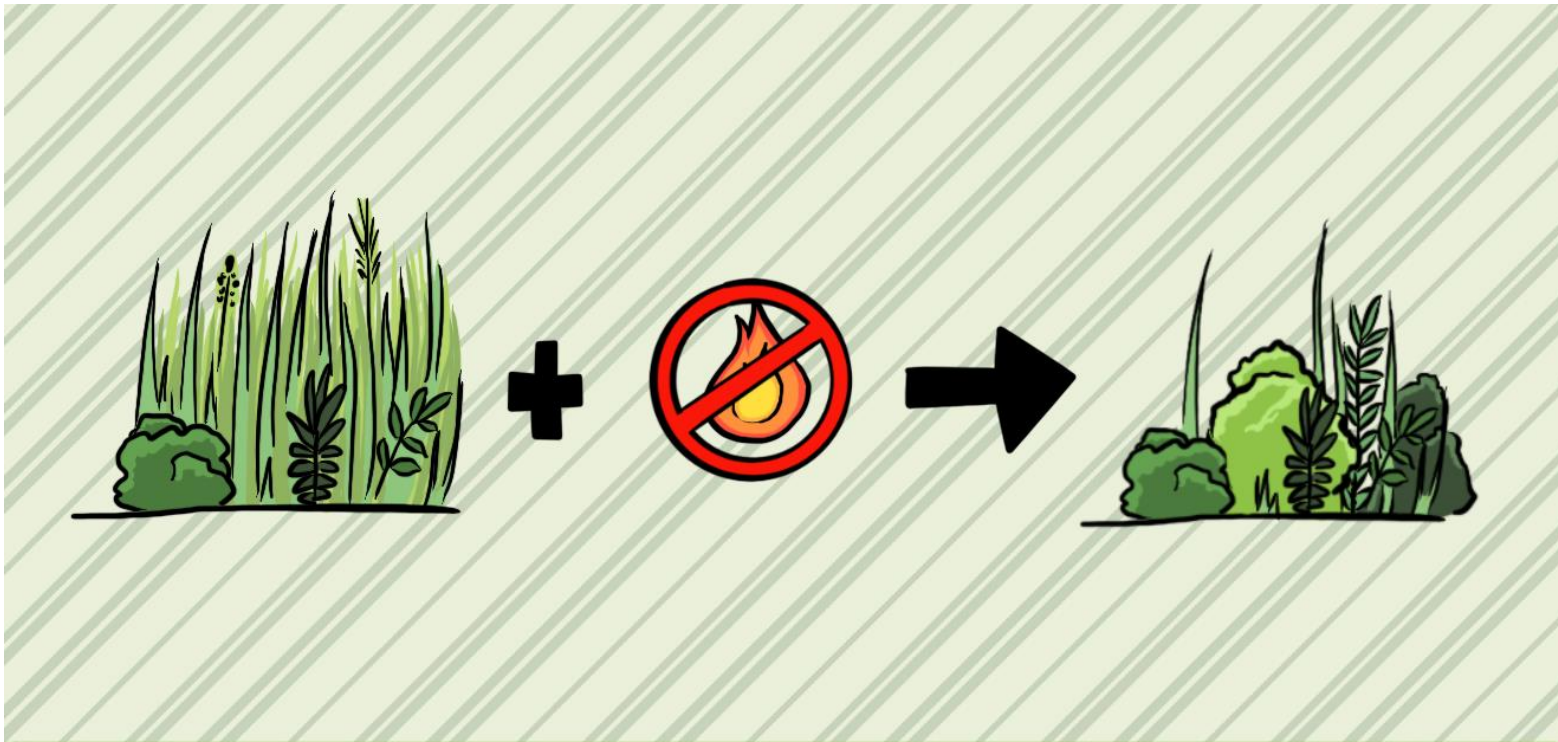
Fire might sound like a bad thing, but it is important! Plants that grow in prairies grow back quickly because they grow from their base instead of their tops. As long as their roots survive, they do too!



Fire has three main functions in a prairie. Firstly, fire burns dead brush that blocks sunlight from reaching new growth. Second, the ash from burnt plants provided nutrients to that growth.



Third, fire burns away less fire-resistant plant species that may be invasive or alter the habitat. It helps preserve the prairie as a whole.



Without fire, brush would pile up and block the sun from reaching new growth. Different plants that are not fire-resistant would grow and gradually change the habitat away from a prairie.



The bit of prairie in Christy Woods reminds us how important nature is. It is a wonderful place of learning and conservation!

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